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ABSTRACT

The National Center for Educational Statistics 1998 Report stated that one in ten schools in their sample reported at least one violent crime over the past year. To promote school safety, educators have used traditional law enforcement methods that rely heavily on surveillance, penalties, and punishment. These methods applied to schools can be effective but they carry major negative side effects, including a large financial burden. This digest represents an alternative approach to creating and maintaining safe schools. The approach, known as Invitational Education, provides a framework for making schools more exciting, satisfying, and enriching. Invitational Education centers on four guiding principles of respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. The Five P's of the concept, people, places, policies, programs, and processes, provide the means to address the global nature and symbolic structure of schools. It expands the education process by applying steady and continuous pressure from a number of points. Rather than relying on one program, one policy, or one process, Invitational Learning addresses the total spirit within a school. It is concerned with more than grades, attendance, academic achievement, discipline, and test scores. It is concerned with the skills of becoming a decent and productive citizen in a democratic society. (JDM)

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Creating Safe Schools Through Invitational Education

William Watson Purkey

When asked what they expect from their schools, most parents, teachers, administrators, and students will answer: "I want my school to be safe." Unfortunately, there is ample evidence that schools are not as safe as we would like. The National Center for Education Statistics 1998 Report showed that one in ten schools in their sample reported at least one violent crime over the past year. Fifty-seven percent reported experiencing at least one crime incident that was reported to law enforcement officials (Morrissey, 1998).

To promote school safety, educators have relied primarily on traditional law enforcement methods, including metal detectors, security guards, closed circuit television, locking all doors and windows except one or two entrances, and conducting "shake-down" searches and locker checks. These law enforcement methods rely heavily on surveillance, penalties, and punishments, such as suspensions, expulsions, alternative school placement, arrests, and fines placed on parents or guardians.

While sometimes effective, traditional law enforcement methods applied to schools carry major negative side effects. These include a significant financial burden, a reduction of time for classroom instruction, and a decline in teacher and student morale. Metal detectors, security guards, surveillance cameras, locker checks, and body searches create a pervasive atmosphere of apprehension among faculty, staff, students, and parents. The purpose of this digest is to present an alternate approach to creating and maintaining safe schools called "Invitational Education" (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Juhnke & Purkey, 1995; Shoffner & Vacc, 1999.)

Overview

Invitational Education provides a framework for making schools a more exciting, satisfying, and enriching experience for everyone – *all* students, *all* faculty and staff, and *all* visitors. This framework goes beyond reforming or restructuring; its goal is to transform the fundamental character of the school. Invitational Education asserts that everybody and everything in and around schools adds to, or subtracts from, school safety. It centers on four guiding principles of respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality.

1. *Respect:* Everyone in the school is able, valuable, and responsible and is to be treated accordingly.

2. *Trust:* Education is a cooperative, collaborative activity where process is as important as product.

3. *Optimism:* People possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor.

4. *Intentionality:* Safe schools are best realized by creating and maintaining inviting places, policies, processes, and programs and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally. By centering itself on respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality, Invitational Education provides a common language of transformation and a consistent theory of practice.

How Invitational Education Works

The "Five P's" of Invitational Education, standing for people, places, policies, programs, and processes, provide the means to address the global nature and symbolic structure of the school. It expands the educative process by applying steady and continuous pressure from a number of points, much like a starfish conquers oysters.

The Starfish Analogy

Starfish live to eat oysters. To defend itself, the oyster has two stout shells that fit tightly together and are held in place by a powerful muscle. When a starfish locates an oyster, it places itself on the top shell. Then gently, gradually, and continuously, the starfish uses each of its five points in turn to keep steady pressure on the one oyster muscle. While one point pulls, the other four rest. The single oyster muscle, while incredibly powerful, gets no rest. Inevitably and irresistibly, the oyster shells open and the starfish has its meal. Steady and continuous pressure from a number of points can overcome the powerful muscle of the oyster, and by analogy, the biggest challenge in schools, that of school safety. Here is how the Invitational Education starfish looks when the "Five P" approach is applied.

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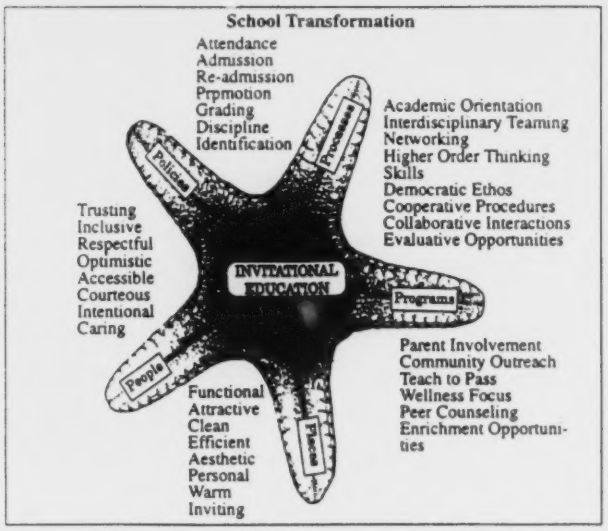

The Five Powerful P's

The following activities illustrate how Invitational Education is woven into the fabric of the school.

People: Faculty and staff work as a school family. Activities include training in stress reduction and conflict management, long-term relationships between faculty and students, courteous staff, and respect for everyone. Special attention is given to personal grooming and professional dress.

Places: Careful attention is given to the physical environment, including adequate lighting, well-maintained buildings and grounds, clean rest rooms, attractive classrooms and cafeterias, and displays celebrating student accomplishments. Ways are found to enhance the physical environment of the school, no matter how old the building.

Policies: Attendance, grading, promotion, discipline and other policies are developed and maintained within a circle of respect for everyone involved. Families are kept informed through newsletters, bulletins, phone calls and meetings. Every school policy is democratically developed, easy to understand, and made available to everyone involved.

Programs: Among the many programs that help to create safe schools are community outreach, wellness, and enrichment opportunities for everyone in the school. Programs that involve parents are strongly encouraged. Guidance counselors play a central role in arranging beneficial programs.

Processes: Process is the way in which things are done in the school. A democratic ethos is valued along with an academic orientation. All activities and procedures are designed to honor and include everyone. Ideas, suggestions, and concerns are welcomed in the inviting school.

To date, Invitational Education has been successfully applied to over 140 schools throughout North America. The success of these programs has been documented and described in professional research articles (Clover & Alexander, 1992; Stanley & Purkey, 1994; Purkey & Strahan, 1995). For detailed information, please contact the International Alliance for Invitational Education, c/o School of Education, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, P.O. Box 26171, Greensboro, NC 27402-6171.

Conclusion

Rather than relying on one program, one policy, or one process, Invitational Education addresses the total *zeitgeist,* the spirit within a school. It has a wider focus of application than traditional efforts to make schools safe. It is concerned with more than grades, attendance, academic achievement, discipline, test scores, and even student self-esteem. It is concerned with the skills of becoming a decent and productive citizen in a democratic society.

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